

# Responding to China—Changing Donor Discourse and Perspectives on Africa?

Eileen Connolly and Aurelie Sicard

*Centre for International Studies, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University*

---

## ABSTRACT

In the past decade new donors, especially China, have become important in the international system and have developed relationships with states in sub-Saharan Africa that present a challenge to the established donors of the OECD. At the same time the international financial crisis of 2008 has weakened both Europe and America ideologically, as well as in terms of their comparative international power based on their economic strength. For many states this has meant a significant reduction in aid budgets, making it more likely that the influence of non-OECD donors, including China, will continue to grow. What does this mean for the development programs of OECD states, including Ireland and the UK, and for their relationship with the governments of sub-Saharan African states? This paper answers this question analysing the policy discourse of the UK and Irish development agencies to determine if it has shifted in the period 2006-2011 in response to the changing international realities, including the challenges presented by the rise of China as a donor. It does this by using a word count content analysis of key documents published by the Irish and British development agencies. It finds a significant level of readjustment to the new international realities in both sets of documents, including a significant rehabilitation of the image of Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past decade the failure of sub-Saharan Africa to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), break the poverty cycle and enter an upward trajectory of development has been at the heart of what is being seen as the failure of the aid project.<sup>1</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa has been considered the region of the world with the most intractable development problem. It has been a major focus for the development efforts of OECD states in Europe and North America and that engagement, along with the involvement of the World Bank and IMF, has led to what has been described by some as an intrusive set of conditionalities attached to aid that has limited the autonomy of governments.<sup>2</sup> This has in turn led to increasing resentment among African governments of what has been seen as unwarranted external interference in their internal affairs and an increasing dissatisfaction with their relationship with Western governments.<sup>3</sup> At the same time new donors, especially China, have become important in the

---

Author's e-mail: [Eileen.connolly@dcu.ie](mailto:Eileen.connolly@dcu.ie)

doi: 10.3318/ISIA.2012.23.05

<sup>1</sup> William Easterly, *The white man's burden* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Rita Abrahamsen, *Disciplining democracy* (London, 2000), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Rita Abrahamsen, 'The power of partnerships in global governance', *Third World Quarterly* 25 (8) (2004), 1453–67.

international system. The way in which these new donors gave aid and the relationship they forged with developing states was significantly different to the consensus that has been built up amongst the OECD states.<sup>4</sup> As Ngaire Woods argued, ‘the world of development assistance is being shaken by the power shift occurring across the global economy’, as ‘emerging powers build aid programmes and forge stronger relationships with poor countries, no existing development assistance programme will be immune from the effects’.<sup>5</sup> The international financial crisis of 2008 has weakened both Europe and America, ideologically, as well as in terms of their comparative international power based on economic strength, and also for many states this has meant a significant reduction in aid budgets which it is expected will continue into the future. It is likely that the influence of non-OECD donors and the reluctance of the governments of developing states to accept conditionality attached to aid will increase. What does this mean for the development programs of OECD states, including Ireland, and for their relationship with the governments of sub-Saharan African states?

In 2011 Irish Aid launched a new ‘Africa strategy’<sup>6</sup> that placed a much greater focus on trade and investment than previous policy documents had. Does this initiative contain a significant change of direction in response to the new international realities? Is there evidence that other OECD donors are also making the same sort of reassessment? To examine if this process of re-evaluation is already taking place this paper analyses the international development policies of Ireland and the UK, and asks if there is evidence that the attitude and policy of these two states towards Africa is changing in the light of these new realities. Are they moving closer in practice to a Chinese model of engagement with African states? Ireland and the UK occupy different positions in the international system. The UK is a major international economy, a significant international actor that is a permanent member of the UN Security Council with defined strategic interests, while in contrast Ireland is a small economy that has made a strong commitment to development, even if this has to some extent been stalled by the severity of the financial crisis Ireland has faced since 2008. In terms of its strategic interest Ireland is a neutral country that has made a major contribution to the UN’s peacekeeping missions. Both states have placed a strong focus on Africa in their development programmes, the UK because of its colonial history and Ireland because of the experience of Irish NGOs and missionaries in Africa and its early decision to focus on a small number of very poor countries.<sup>7</sup> Relations with sub-Saharan Africa are the lens through which this potential policy change is investigated, both because it is the perceived development failure of Africa that has been the motivator of the multilateral consensus of the past 20 years, and because it is in Africa that the role of emerging donors, especially China, is most evident and challenging. Therefore, one would expect to see the clearest reaction to the changed international circumstances in the policies of donors. Ireland and the UK may also give early indications of the changing international policy trend as both countries had post-crisis General Elections, in 2010 in the UK and in 2011 in Ireland, both of which brought into government political parties that had been out of power for some time—13 years in the case of Britain and 14 years for Ireland—making it easier for these governments to break with past policies.

This paper will first discuss the challenge that China’s policy in Africa presents to OECD states. Based on this discussion, policy areas are identified in which a change of

---

<sup>4</sup> Ngaire Woods, ‘Whose aid? Whose influence? China, emerging donors and the silent revolution in development assistance’, *International Affairs* 84 (6) (2008), 1205–21.

<sup>5</sup> Woods, ‘Whose aid? Whose influence?’, 1205.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Ireland and Africa: our partnership with a changing continent* (Dublin, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Eileen Connolly, ‘The evolution and ambition of Ireland’s development aid policy’, in Ben Tonra, Michael Kennedy, John Doyle and Noel Dorr (eds), *Irish Foreign Policy* (Dublin, 2012), 152–68.

discourse is most likely to be evident if OECD donors are responding to the challenge presented by Chinese aid policies in Africa. These policy areas are then used as the framework for a word count analysis of key documents published by the two states' development agencies, Irish Aid and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). The selected documents were published between 2006 and 2011, spanning the period from just before the international financial crisis to just after the change of governments, which allows an assessment of any changes in policy discourse during these pivotal years. The key documents for Ireland are: the *White Paper on Irish Aid* (2006); the *Irish Aid Annual Report* (written 2009, published 2010); the *Irish Aid Annual Report* (written 2010, published 2011); and the *Ireland and Africa: our partnership with a changing continent* strategy paper published in September 2011. The key documents from the UK Department for International Development are as follows: the *DFID White Paper* (2006); *Eliminating world poverty: building our common future* (2009); and a report on *The future of UK Aid* (2011).<sup>8</sup>

### THE OECD CONSENSUS ON ODA AND THE CHALLENGE OF CHINA<sup>9</sup>

As early as 2007 the head of the DAC (the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD) expressed the belief that new donors, but especially China, would disrupt the consensus that had been built up among the OECD states on the way forward for sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>10</sup> This consensus included agreement on what aid is for, where it should be best directed and how it should be managed.<sup>11</sup> The idea of an agreed policy framework and co-ordination between donors was given concrete form by the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation (2003) and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and these agreements came to represent the norms for aid delivery among OECD donors.<sup>12</sup> This process was deepened through a series of high-level fora on aid harmonisation, the fourth and most recent taking place in Busan, South Korea in 2011. The meeting at Busan was widely seen as an event that would make or break the international consensus. Optimistic commentators

---

<sup>8</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs, *White Paper on Irish Aid* (Dublin, 2006), available at: <http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/whitepaper/assets/White%20Paper%20English.pdf> (20 September 2012); Department of Foreign Affairs, *Irish Aid Annual Report 2009: focus on poverty and hunger* (Dublin, 2010), available at: <http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/article1a2a.html?article=1665> (20 September 2012); Department of Foreign Affairs *Irish Aid Annual Report 2010: aid works—delivering on results* (Dublin, 2011), available at: <http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/annual-report-2010.html> (20 September 2012); Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Ireland and Africa: our partnership with a changing continent* (Dublin, 2011), available at: <http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/article5e9e.html?article=1851> (20 September 2012); DFID, *White Paper eliminating world poverty: making governance work for the poor* (London, 2006), available at: <http://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/DFID%20whitepaper%202006.pdf> (20 September 2012); DFID, *Eliminating world poverty: building our common future* (London, 2009), available at: [http://consultation.dfid.gov.uk/whitepaper2009/files/2009/03/white-paper\\_building\\_our\\_common\\_future\\_hires.pdf](http://consultation.dfid.gov.uk/whitepaper2009/files/2009/03/white-paper_building_our_common_future_hires.pdf) (20 September 2012); DFID, *The future of UK Aid: changing lives, delivering results* (London, 2011), available at: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/mar/BAR-MAR-summary-document-web.pdf> (20 September 2012).

<sup>9</sup> The DAC [Development Assistance Committee] Defines and measures 'official development assistance' (ODA) playing an influential role in the building of the 'consensus' on aid. It provides the key measures used in practically all aid targets and assessments of aid performance', see: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/> (2 October 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Manning, head of the OECD DAC, 'Will 'emerging donors' change the face of international cooperation?', public lecture, 9 March 2007, available at: [www.odi.org.uk/speeches/apgood/international\\_development/9thmar/index.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/speeches/apgood/international_development/9thmar/index.html) (20 September 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Sven Grimm, John Humphrey, Erik Lundsgaarde and Sarah-Lea John de Sousa, *European development cooperation to 2020: challenges by new actors in international development*, European Development Cooperation Working Paper, 4, (Bonn, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Eileen Connolly and Lorna Gold, 'Development and the United Nations: achievements and challenges for the future', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 17 (1) (2006), 61–75.

hoped that China, and other new donors, could be brought into the international consensus,<sup>13</sup> however the conference concluded with an agreed statement that was only supported by China and other new donors because it effectively allowed them to distance themselves from the prior OECD consensus.<sup>14</sup>

The 15 years before the financial crash saw a period of relative international stability and economic growth: a combination of factors that facilitated the building of multilateral co-operation. There was a belief that the ‘Western democratic’ model of multi-party liberal democracy should be the blueprint for the rest of the world and that economic liberalisation and market globalisation were the best paths to development.<sup>15</sup> The perspective on ‘Africa’ and a set of ideas on the reasons for the development failure of sub-Saharan Africa shifted significantly during the period in which the agreed multi-lateral framework on the aid relationship developed. An early perspective on Africa’s development problem saw it as stemming from colonialism, and therefore it was argued that the former colonial powers had a responsibility to provide development aid, this view gave way to an increasing tendency to place the blame for development failures on African states themselves.<sup>16</sup> As part of the justification for the stringent conditions imposed on African states, a discourse developed that saw Africa as a bad news story and African states and their political leaders as being flawed, lacking in legitimacy and unable to act in the interests of their populations. As a result the entire sub-continent was seen through a lens of disaster, violence, poverty and corruption, for which Africans were held primarily to blame. This view made it easy to justify bilateral aid that operated by imposing a largely externally generated agenda onto recipient states, which meant that not only the content of policy but also the institutions of the state and its democratic processes were subject to a high degree of external influence and even when the intentions of individual donors were from their perspective benign, this relationship placed the governments of aid recipient countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa, in a subservient position limiting their autonomy and policy space.<sup>17</sup> Although OECD donors’ conditionalities have not been consistently applied they have been wide ranging, with the underlying aim of encouraging a Western-style liberal democracy fashioned according to an internationally sanctioned blueprint and building the legal and institutional framework to support the free-market.<sup>18</sup> This has included programmes of privatisation and the imposition of user fees for basic services.

In contrast to this, China’s engagement with African states offers aid without political or policy conditions. China’s style of ‘aid’ combines ‘loans, credits and debt write-offs with special trade arrangements and commercial investments’ and is part of China’s strategy to increase its energy security, enlarge trading opportunities and to develop new economic partnerships.<sup>19</sup> China’s rhetoric is also one of an equal relationship between the Chinese government and the governments of African states, based on a shared experience of colonialism and exploitation which again contrasts with the discourse of state failure, patrimonialism and corruption that has dominated the discourse on African government in the DAC donor community.

---

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Glennie and Andrew Rogerson, *Global reach is the prize at Busan*, ODI Opinion Paper, <http://www.odi.org.uk/opinion/docs/7293.pdf> (20 September 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Mark Tran, ‘China and India to join aid partnership on new terms’, *Guardian*, 1 December 2011. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2011/dec/01/china-india-aid-partnership> (21 September 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Grimm *et al.*, *European development cooperation to 2020*.

<sup>16</sup> Emma Mawdsley and Jonathan Rigg, ‘The World Development Report II: continuity and change in development orthodoxies’, *Progress in Development Studies* 3 (4) (2003), 271–86: 271.

<sup>17</sup> Connolly, ‘The evolution and ambition of Ireland’s development aid policy’, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Grimm *et al.*, *European development cooperation to 2020*.

<sup>19</sup> Woods, ‘Whose aid? Whose influence?’, 1205

In what areas would adjustments to pre-existing OECD donor policy be expected to take place in the face of this challenge presented by China? Given the focus that China has placed on trade and investment as a key part of its relationship with developing states, has the discourse on trade with, and investment in, Africa in the policy discourse of OECD states changed? In view of the international financial crisis and continued growth of African economies at an approximate average of 5 per cent a year,<sup>20</sup> will OECD donors, following China's example, be more upfront about the mutual gains that could exist from increased economic engagement with Africa? If OECD states are responding to China, and do not want to lose economic advantage to China, will Western donors increasingly reduce the conditionalities attached to the aid relationship, and as part of this are they also including a more positive discourse on Africa in the policy documents? Although it is not possible from the type of document reviewed in this paper to assess actual conditions attached to aid it is possible to assess the weight given to those policy areas that conditionality is designed to address—in particular the area of governance including accountability and corruption.

## ANALYSING THE DOCUMENTS

In addition to their characteristics as international aid donors, outlined in the introduction, the UK and Ireland were chosen for discussion here because of the focus they both have on sub-Saharan Africa and because it was possible for both donor agencies to extract a comparator set of documents. For each of the donor agencies a small number of key documents was selected, spanning the period from just before the financial crisis to the most recent document available from the period after the election of the new government in each state. This resulted in four documents for Ireland and three from the UK (see Tables 1 and 2). The documents were subject to a content analysis using a freeware programme, the Free University of Berlin's TextSTAT software<sup>21</sup> that produced tables of frequencies for all words contained in the documents. Stopwords<sup>22</sup> were then excluded. As well as producing tables of frequencies, the TextSTAT software allows individual words to be seen in context. Initially the frequency tables were searched for a list of words which were considered to reflect the key areas of policy discourse that highlighted the differences between the OECD consensus on aid policy and policies followed by China. It was decided to look at all references to Africa and Africans to see if the trend of the discourse was negative or positive. It was expected that in the earlier documents, references to Africa and Africans would tend to be negative and a response to the changed international conditions would mean that this discourse would shift to one with a more positive tone. This more positive tone could reflect either a response to China's relationship with African states or a desire from a position of economic self-interest to build better relationships with African states. As part of this potential change in discourse, words that were strongly related to key OECD aid conditionalities were also counted. Here it was hypothesised that fewer mentions of key conditionality words would indicate a reduced focus on conditionality as part of the aid relationship. Words relating to trade and investment were also analysed to see if the documents showed a progressively increased focus on trade with Africa or on the role of private investment in African development. And finally the word China itself was also analysed to see if the documents provided any evidence of the changed

---

<sup>20</sup> The IMF reports that for 2012 oil-exporting states will see a GDP growth of 7.1 per cent, low income countries will have a 5.9 per cent GDP growth and even fragile states (Burundi, Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Togo and Zimbabwe) will have a 6.6 per cent GDP growth. Available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2012/CAR051412A.htm> (6 June 2012).

<sup>21</sup> TextStat can be downloaded at: <http://neon.niederlandistik.fu-berlin.de/en/textstat/> (4 October 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Stopwords are words such as: 'the', 'and', 'were', etc. that make up the largest proportion of words in any document.

perception of China, particularly in its new role as an influential donor. In summary the keywords focused on in the analysis were as follows:

- Africa/African(s) and sub-Saharan Africa
- China
- Trade
- Investment
- Governance
- Corruption
- Accountable/Accountability

In addition to this, the frequency tables were scanned to see if there were any unexpected anomalies, including frequently used words that had not been anticipated in the initial analysis, or the absence of a word that would have been expected given the nature of the documents. ‘Africa’ and related words including ‘sub-Saharan Africa’ were also looked at in context to see if the reference was positive, negative or neutral. Neutral references included those found in headings, references that are primarily the actions of the aid agency, and statements of fact that were either negative or positive in their impact. Negative references were considered to be any reference that portrayed in an unfavourable light Africa, African people or African states and their governments, even if those references were true. This included any references that could be construed as indicating a lack of agency on the part of Africans, African states or African governments. Positive references were considered to be those that portrayed Africa and Africans in a favourable light and accorded agency to African people and African governments.

Additional factors that have to be taken into account when comparing the documents are the length of the document, and the purpose for which the document was written. Both of these factors are discussed in the analysis with relation to the specific documents.

**Table 1. Total word count, UK documents**

Document type	Year published	Word count
DFID White Paper	2006	40,603
DFID Eliminating world poverty	2009	36,322
DFID The future of UK Aid	2011	12,308

**Table 2. Total word count, Irish Aid documents**

Document type	Year published	Word count
White Paper on Irish Aid	2006	35,613
2009 Annual Report	2010	24,932
2010 Annual Report	2011	13,890
Africa strategy	2011	7,524

### *Analysis of UK documents*

The UK chaired the G8 Gleneagles Summit in 2005 with the aim of reaching agreement on African development and climate change; the summit turned out to be a tremendous success and publicity coup for the British government. Not surprisingly then, the 2006 *White Paper* built on that success and also referred back to the details of that agreement. In the introduction to the document it is claimed that ‘development and Africa are at the heart of our G8 presidency’ and that the British government intended to make Africa a priority during its G8 and EU presidency. The introduction also states a belief in the effectiveness of aid, arguing that in Africa ‘as a whole, the situation would be worse without aid—economic growth would have been around one per cent lower between 1973 and 2001’.<sup>23</sup> But belief in aid goes further than this and the *White Paper* argues that ‘Aid can help improve the way a country is governed’.<sup>24</sup> It is clear that the corollary of this is that aid is necessary as a carrot in order to entice African governments to ‘commit themselves and their people to lead their own development by improving governance, upholding the rule of law, and using their resources to fight poverty’.<sup>25</sup> They reiterate that the commitments made in 2005 ‘in particular relating to Africa represented a deal’ or a contract ‘in which increased aid and debt relief were offered in return for a commitment to better governance’.<sup>26</sup> As a result of these negotiations, including the incentive of an increased volume of aid, according to DFID, African leaders agreed to draw up ambitious plans to tackle poverty and to work to end corruption, bad governance and conflict. This summit and the *White Paper* that followed it in 2006 can be seen as the peak of the process of increasing the consensus amongst OECD donors, that also included the idea that African leaders and governments were a key obstacle to development and that they could only be induced to behave reasonably through the incentives of aid and debt forgiveness.

The policy report published in 2009,<sup>27</sup> the next major UK document on development, was drawn up in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis. It also follows the recognition by international actors and the academic literature of the key role that new donors, particularly China, were beginning to play in Africa. The changed international context was recognised in the document when it said that its publication came at a ‘critical juncture in the fight to eliminate poverty’.<sup>28</sup> The preface by the secretary of state for international development is very strongly focused on the past achievements of the UK in overseas development assistance, including the UK’s role in the Millennium Development Goals, the Gleneagles process of 2005, and the Make Poverty History Campaign, and it restates the intention to ‘strive to lead the world in policy coherence’.<sup>29</sup> This is a significant statement at a time when the policy coherence agenda was under pressure and looking increasingly fragile. The introduction also focuses on the international crisis, reflecting the fear that it may reverse the development gains that it claims DFID had been instrumental in achieving. Although it doesn’t mention China in this context it is perhaps a sub-text—that not only has the financial crisis been damaging to development, but also the role that China has assumed in promoting development in Africa is seen as undermining the UK position. The document reflects the attempts by the British government to persuade China to join the

---

<sup>23</sup> DFID, *White Paper*, 2006, xiii.

<sup>24</sup> DFID, *White Paper*, 2006, xiii.

<sup>25</sup> DFID, *White Paper*, 2006, 3

<sup>26</sup> DFID, *White Paper*, 2006, v.

<sup>27</sup> DFID, *Eliminating world poverty*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> DFID, *Eliminating world poverty*, 2009, 5.

<sup>29</sup> DFID, *Eliminating world poverty*, 2009, 8.

OECD development consensus, stating that the ‘UK has worked closely with China on sustainable development in Africa on all aspects of climate change and on the dissemination of lessons to other developing countries of China’s experience in reducing poverty over the past 30 years’.<sup>30</sup>

The document claims that it marks a new departure in UK Aid policy that is designed to meet the new challenges to the ‘aid project’, however, rather than offering a stronger new direction in British aid policy, the document displays a lack of clarity about the future policy direction. It is focused on the path that British aid policy has taken in the past decade and it is arguing for a continuation of that policy framework. It is fearful that the new international conditions present a challenge to this framework but it has not given up on the basic tenets of its existing policy path, still seeing it as the best way forward. While this is a meta-narrative of the document, other aspects indicate a reframing of ideas under pressure from the changing international situation.

The final document discussed is a review of UK Aid which took place after the General Election that brought the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition into power. It is much briefer than the other two documents and focuses on an assessment of the UK’s aid programme. One notable thing about its introduction, which seems out of kilter with international developments including the growing importance of government-to-government relations, is the focus it places on the individual; it repeatedly uses the word ‘people’, very rarely using the word ‘state’. For example it says we will do more ‘to provide people with opportunities to work, trade and save – so they can lift themselves out of poverty and no longer rely on aid’<sup>31</sup>. Given the increased focus on trade flows, and the negotiation of trading relationships between governments, the use of ‘people’ and ‘trade’ in the same sentence seems out of touch with the changing relationship between the developed and the developing states in the global economy. In spite of this, another aspect of the document appeared to be that of adjusting to the changed relationship, particularly with regard to the degree of emphasis it places on those policy areas that reflect political conditionality associated with aid.

Even between the two documents of 2006 and 2009 there was a marked reduction in the attention given to governance, accountability and corruption. In 2006, ‘governance’ appeared in the document 88 times and ‘corruption’ 71 times. In terms of significance, this can be compared to other terms that one would expect to see in a document of this type, for example ‘poverty’, which appeared 143 times and ‘development’ which appeared 157 times. Emphasising the technical nature of the good governance agenda, democracy only appeared five times in total. By 2009 the number of times governance and corruption were mentioned had dropped back to 41 and 19 respectively, although the overall length of the 2009 document was not significantly shorter than the 2006 *White Paper*. While the number of times governance was mentioned was virtually halved, for corruption that drop was more significant at approximately 70 per cent. In 2009 the small number of references to democracy remained fairly consistent with the 2006 figure; references to both poverty and development in 2009 increased. In the much smaller document of 2011 the words ‘governance’ and ‘corruption’ had virtually disappeared with only one mention of each. The term ‘accountability’ was much less significant than expected; it was mentioned only 16 times in 2006, 18 times in 2009 and twice in the 2011 document.

---

<sup>30</sup> DFID, *Eliminating world poverty*, 2009, 131.

<sup>31</sup> DFID, *The future of UK Aid: changing lives, delivering result*, 2011, 5



**Table 3. Key words on conditionalities and economic links, UK documents**

	DFID White Paper 2006	Eliminating World Poverty, 2009	The future of UK Aid 2011
Governance	88	41	1
Corruption	71	19	1
Trade	51	72	11
China	14	13	4

Between 2006 and 2009 the number of times trade was mentioned increased from 51 to 72, however, hardly any of these references were to trade between the UK and African states. Also there was virtually no mention of the role of investment. In the 2011 document there is a comparative decrease in the number of times trade is mentioned, compared to the earlier documents, but this can be explained by the more specialist nature of the document, and also by noting that trade is the primary concern of another government department. Early in 2011 the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills had issued a policy document entitled ‘Trade and investment for growth’ which argued that as ‘we work to rebuild our own economy, we must redouble our efforts to enable developing countries to build their own paths to growth through trade and investment, and to help them develop the capacity to do so, especially in Africa. This is the right thing to do both on moral grounds and for Britain’s national interest’.<sup>32</sup> The document mentioned Africa 39 times, primarily in a positive or neutral context. Supporting this position the development secretary, Andrew Mitchell, in a major speech later in 2011 argued strongly for a re-evaluation and re-engagement with Africa, saying that ‘Africa is a continent of innovation, enterprise and opportunity’.<sup>33</sup>

Turning to the collective designations, ‘Africa’ and ‘African’, the proportionate use of these terms has decreased between 2006 and 2011, being 97 in 2006, 82 in 2009 and 17 in 2011. However there has been a slight increase in the number of times ‘Africa’ and ‘African’ are mentioned in a positive context. The term ‘sub-Saharan Africa’ was used only half as many times in 2009 and 2011 as it was used in 2006, but in all these years it is used in an overwhelmingly negative context. In 2006, out of the 16 times sub-Saharan Africa was mentioned 15 of these were in a negative context and the remaining one occasion was neutral. Over this time, there has been a small but significant increase in the number of times Africa/n is used in a positive context; in the *White Paper* of 2006 only 5 per cent of references were positive but this rose to 18 per cent in both the 2009 and the 2011 documents.

In these documents the number of times the word ‘China’ was used has changed proportionally little over time, being 14 in 2006, 13 in 2009 and four in 2011, and only two of the total references to China are negative. In 2006 the DFID had as a key commitment the intention to push ‘for the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee to monitor and hold donors to account on their development commitments, and to work more closely with new non-OECD donors such as India and China’.<sup>34</sup> In the 2009 document most of the references to China comment on its growing economic strength. The document outlines the UK strategy towards China, claiming that the ‘UK has worked closely with China on sustainable development in Africa, on all

<sup>32</sup> Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, ‘Trade and investment for growth’ (2011) is available at: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/international-trade-investment-and-development/docs/t/11-717-trade-investment-for-growth.pdf> (3 October 2012).

<sup>33</sup> The development secretary’s 2011 speech is available at: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/News/Speeches-and-statements/2011/Andrew-Mitchell-on-why-trade-and-business-is-booming-in-Africa/> (4 October 2012).

<sup>34</sup> DFID, *White Paper*, 2006, xii.

aspects of climate change and on the dissemination of lessons to other developing states'.<sup>35</sup> In the 2011 document three of the four mentions of China refer to the ending of UK aid to China, in one case describing China as a country that has recently 'graduated' from UK aid.<sup>36</sup>

In the UK documents, the clearest indication of the changed international climate and the impact of China as a donor is in the de-emphasising of issues of governance and corruption, and a slightly more positive discourse on Africa. The relative absence of references to trade in the documents, especially trade with Africa, is explained by the fact that the lead role on this issue is being taken by another government department. While the documents of 2006 and 2009 indicate that bringing China into the OECD consensus was a key aim of UK policy, the absence of any reference to this policy goal in the 2011 document may reflect a different attitude on the part of the new government, or that it had become clear at this stage that China had no intention of shifting its policy position.

**Table 4. Total use of 'Africa(n)', UK documents**

Document type	Year published	Total		Neutral		Negative		Positive	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
DFID White Paper	2006	97	30%	29	30%	64	66%	5	5%
Eliminating World Poverty	2009	82	31%	25	31%	42	51%	15	18%
The future of UK Aid	2011	17	24%	4	24%	8	59%	5	18%

#### *Analysis of the Irish documents*

Ireland's General Election of February 2011, like that of the UK, brought parties into government that had been in opposition for some time. It was also, as in the UK, the first change of government since the beginning of the financial crisis, and there has been a significant adjustment in the focus of Ireland's development policy, in particular, reflecting a new approach to its relationship with African states. In September 2011 the Irish government hosted an Africa-Ireland Economic Forum where it launched an 'Africa strategy', its new foreign policy document from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.<sup>37</sup> This was the first ever meeting of its kind hosted by an Irish government, with the stated objective of providing an opportunity for African government representatives and Irish business to openly discuss trade and investment opportunities. At the forum a commissioned report<sup>38</sup> emphasised that African economic growth was an economic opportunity that made it essential for Ireland to develop links with African states in a way that they had not done before.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> DFID, *Eliminating world poverty*, 2009, 131.

<sup>36</sup> DFID, *UK lives*, 2011, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Ireland and Africa: our partnership with a changing continent* (Dublin, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> McKinsey Global Institute, *Lions on the move: the progress and potential of African economies*, available at:

[http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/mgi/research/productivity\\_competitiveness\\_and\\_growth/lions\\_on\\_the\\_move](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/mgi/research/productivity_competitiveness_and_growth/lions_on_the_move) (20 September 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), *Agenda of Ireland-Africa Forum* (Dublin, 2011), available at: <http://www.dfa.ie/uploads/documents/DCD/agenda%20africa-Ireland%20economic%20forum.pdf> (4 October 2012); Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) press release, 9 June 2011, available at: <http://www.merriestreet.ie/index>

Comparing the government strategy paper launched at this conference to the three earlier documents reveals the extent of this shift in emphasis in Irish policy. Ireland's 2006 *White Paper on Irish Aid* and the 2009 *Irish Aid Annual Report* were not only products of the previous government but were also products of the consensus in development policy that had prevailed before the economic crisis of 2008. The 2010 *Annual Report* is something of a hybrid document as it was not published until 2011 after the new government was in office, and it is also beginning to reflect the new international realities post-2008.

In the 2006 *White Paper* and the 2009 *Annual Report* the type of context in which the terms 'Africa' and 'African' (including sub-Saharan African) are used is broadly similar (see Table 5). In the *White Paper* these words are used in a neutral context 44 per cent of the time; compared to 37 per cent in the *Annual Report*; the words are used negatively in 55 per cent and 58 per cent respectively, and positively in one percent in the *White Paper* compared to 5 per cent of references in the 2009 *Annual Report*. This perception of Africa changes dramatically for the following two reports published in 2011. References to 'Africa' or 'African' in a neutral context remained constant at 38 per cent in the *Annual Report*, dropping slightly to 34 per cent in the 'Africa strategy'. However the negative context in which these words are used dropped dramatically to 18 per cent in the *Annual Report* and still further to 9 per cent in the 'Africa strategy', while the number of positive mentions rose to 44 per cent of all references in the *Annual Report* and 57 per cent in the 'Africa strategy'.

**Table 5. Total use of 'Africa(n)', Irish Aid documents**

Document type	Year published	Total 'Africa(n)'	Neutral		Negative		Positive	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
White Paper on Irish Aid	2006	94	41	44%	52	55%	1	1%
2009 Annual Report	2010	38	14	37%	22	58%	2	5%
2010 Annual Report	2011	39	15	38%	7	18%	17	44%
Africa strategy	2011	125	43	34%	11	9%	71	57%

Neutral contexts for the words 'Africa' and 'African' were found in headings; sentences that primarily refer to the actions of Irish Aid; and in statements of facts with neither negative nor positive connotations. Negative contexts for Africa include; poor governance and corruption; conflict; bad/disimproving social conditions including poverty; lack of human rights; failure to reach MDGs; dependence on external actors; and the comparatively poor position of women. Positive contexts for Africa include; progress in spite of challenges; region with fast-growing economies; growing trade with China and other emerging economies; governments described as counterparts of Irish politicians; and Africa's growing attractiveness for international investment. Nothing had objectively changed in the material and political conditions that existed in Africa; the big difference was in how the Irish government presented its view of Africa and Africans. In particular this can be seen in a significant reduction in the use of the terms 'governance' and 'corruption', terms strongly associated with political conditionality in the past.

In the *White Paper*, ‘governance’ was mentioned 39 times (see Table 6), frequently associated with corruption, and primarily either in the context of the need for external actors to promote better governance, or of the impact of governance failures on the part of African governments. The frequency with which governance was mentioned remained fairly constant in the two annual reports that followed, but in the ‘Africa strategy’ of 2011 the number of mentions of ‘governance’ had dropped to seven (this would have been the equivalent of 13 if the document had been as long as the *White Paper*). Two of the references in the ‘Africa strategy’ document to governance and four to the African Union are positive in tone; the majority of the remaining references are neutral and restate Irish Aid’s continuing commitment to support good governance. This reiteration of policy may be intended to calm any objections that there might be to the new change of direction, with its emphasis on the private sector and the role of business, investment and trade. Similarly, corruption is mentioned 24 times in the 2006 *White Paper*; this very negative term is used considerably less in the two annual reports and in the ‘Africa strategy’ document of 2011 it is only mentioned once. ‘Accountability’ (and ‘accountable’) is used 32 times in the 2006 *White Paper*; many of these references are to accountability to the Irish taxpayer on the part of Irish Aid and by inference therefore they suggest that recipient governments also need to be accountable to Irish Aid for the money they receive. By 2009 the number of times ‘accountability’/‘accountable’ is used has dropped to 10, rising slightly to 14 in 2010 but in the ‘Africa strategy’ paper these words are entirely absent.

**Table 6. Key words on conditionalities and economic links, Irish Aid documents**

	White Paper on Irish Aid	2009 Annual Report	2010 Annual Report	Africa strategy
Governance	39	19	19	7
Corruption	24	4	6	1
Trade	31	2	3	75
Investment	3	3	3	24
Business	3	9	2	42
China	0	0	2	4

In contrast to this there is a very significant increase in the terms ‘trade’, ‘investment’ and ‘business’ (referring to commercial business) (see Table 6) between 2006 and the ‘Africa strategy’ document of 2011. In the 2006 *White Paper*, trade was mentioned 31 times; and of these references 24 could be classified as neutral, six as negative and only one as positive. In addition there was a separate focus on fair and ethical trade, mentioned on four separate occasions. The main focus on trade was on Ireland’s trading relationship with Africa via the EU and the World Trade Organisation. It emphasised its commitment to working on Irish interests within these organisations, and as a corollary of this, its support for the ‘Aid for Trade’ initiative to strengthen the position of developing countries within the WTO.<sup>40</sup> This accurately reflects the position of the Irish government, which at the time was primarily concerned with defending Irish agricultural interests in international trade, and whose trade

<sup>40</sup> The WTO summarises ‘Aid for Trade’ as aiming ‘to help developing countries, particularly least-developed countries, develop the trade-related skills and infrastructure that is needed to implement and benefit from WTO agreements and to expand their trade’, see: [http://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/devel\\_e/a4t\\_e/aid4trade\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/aid4trade_e.htm) (3 October 2012).

with African states, even its partner countries, was at a very low level.<sup>41</sup> This low level of trade between Ireland and Africa was not seen as a problem, as it was not perceived that Ireland could benefit significantly from increased trade with Africa. There was virtually no focus on trade in either of the annual reports reviewed, only two mentions in the 2009 report and three in the 2010 report. However in the ‘Africa strategy’ of 2011 the number of mentions of trade had risen to 75, a considerable increase on the *White Paper* given the relatively small size of this document. The way in which trade was discussed was also significantly different, with the main emphasis being placed on the mutual benefits to trade for both Ireland and Africa, with a strong practical emphasis on the role of government in building up trade links with individual African states.

The related terms of investment and business, which were also hardly present in the first three documents, become prominent in the ‘Africa strategy’ (2011). Investment is only mentioned three times in each of the first three documents but in the ‘Africa strategy’ it is mentioned 24 times. Similarly business (commercial business) is only mentioned three times in the 2006 *White Paper*, nine times in the 2009 *Annual Report* and twice in the 2010 *Annual Report*. The majority of these references are to the charitable role Irish business can play in linking up and mentoring businesses in Africa. In the ‘Africa strategy’ business is mentioned 42 times, and although the positive developmental role of business is still stressed the benefits to Irish business of trading in Africa, as a fast-growing market, are stressed even more.

There is no mention of China in either the *White Paper* or the 2009 *Annual Report*; in the 2010 *Annual Report* China is mentioned twice—once in the context of an emerging economy that might support the work of the high-level forum on aid effectiveness, and once as a recipient of emergency funding after an earthquake. The reference to China’s possible support for the high-level forum on aid coherence reflects the position of the OECD donor group and is a weak version of the position found in the British documents. In the ‘Africa strategy’ (2011), China is described as a fast-growing economy with whom there is a need to engage in international fora. Its rapidly growing trade with Africa is emphasised and the increased Irish diplomatic engagement in Africa is described as a response to new donors such as China and the need to compete in this market. The ‘Africa strategy’ states that Africa can no longer be considered a marginal player in economic or political terms, and that the Irish government will in the future pursue a more regular and structured relationship with key African countries.<sup>42</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is clear from this analysis that the development policy towards Africa of both the UK and Ireland has shifted since 2006. The UK has been slower to include a positive image of Africa in its development documents (although a more positive image is found in the documents of other UK government departments), and it is more attached to the OECD consensus that predates the financial crisis of 2008. This reflects the different position that the UK holds in the international system, and also the difference in British and Irish self-perceptions of their role in the world. The UK is a more significant international actor and has invested more in the existing international system; it cannot but be aware that the emerging changes in that system are likely to mean a diminution of its importance internationally. This awareness is shown in the shift in discourse that has taken place in the policy documents of both states, in particular in the reduction in the number of times words associated with political

---

<sup>41</sup> Conall O’Caoimh and Patrick McGauley, *Evidence and opportunity: Ireland’s trade with its development programme countries in Africa* (Dublin, 2011). Available at: <http://www.valueaddedinafrica.org/?p=79> (20 September 2012).

<sup>42</sup> DFAT, *Ireland and Africa: our partnership with a changing continent*, 2011, 18.

conditionalities, governance, corruption and accountability, are used. While it could be argued that this shift is a result of the desire to build better relationships with African governments in order to facilitate trade, it is also probable that China's relationship with African states has made any other position untenable for countries, such as the UK and Ireland, that wish to build economic relations with African states in their national interest. Is China's relationship with African states setting the standard for other states that want privileged access to the economies and resources of African states? Given the financial crisis in Ireland it is perhaps understandable that Irish Aid has most dramatically adjusted its position and included a very strong focus on trade with Africa as part of its development discourse, and as part of this it is also including a more positive image of Africa and Africans in its most recent documents. Although this trend is not so strongly present in the UK documents there is still evidence of a more positive presentation of Africa, together with a defocusing on the core 'conditionality' words. Potentially this amounts to a substantial change in the ideas that underpin the aid relationship and it is comparable to the shift that took place in the 1990s when a focus on the historic causes of underdevelopment was replaced by the idea of state failure. The evidence from the analysis of these documents suggests that in the post-Busan world we will see a considerable shift in the political and economic relationships between the OECD donor states and African states. What influence this will in turn have on aid programmes and aid flows is not yet clear.